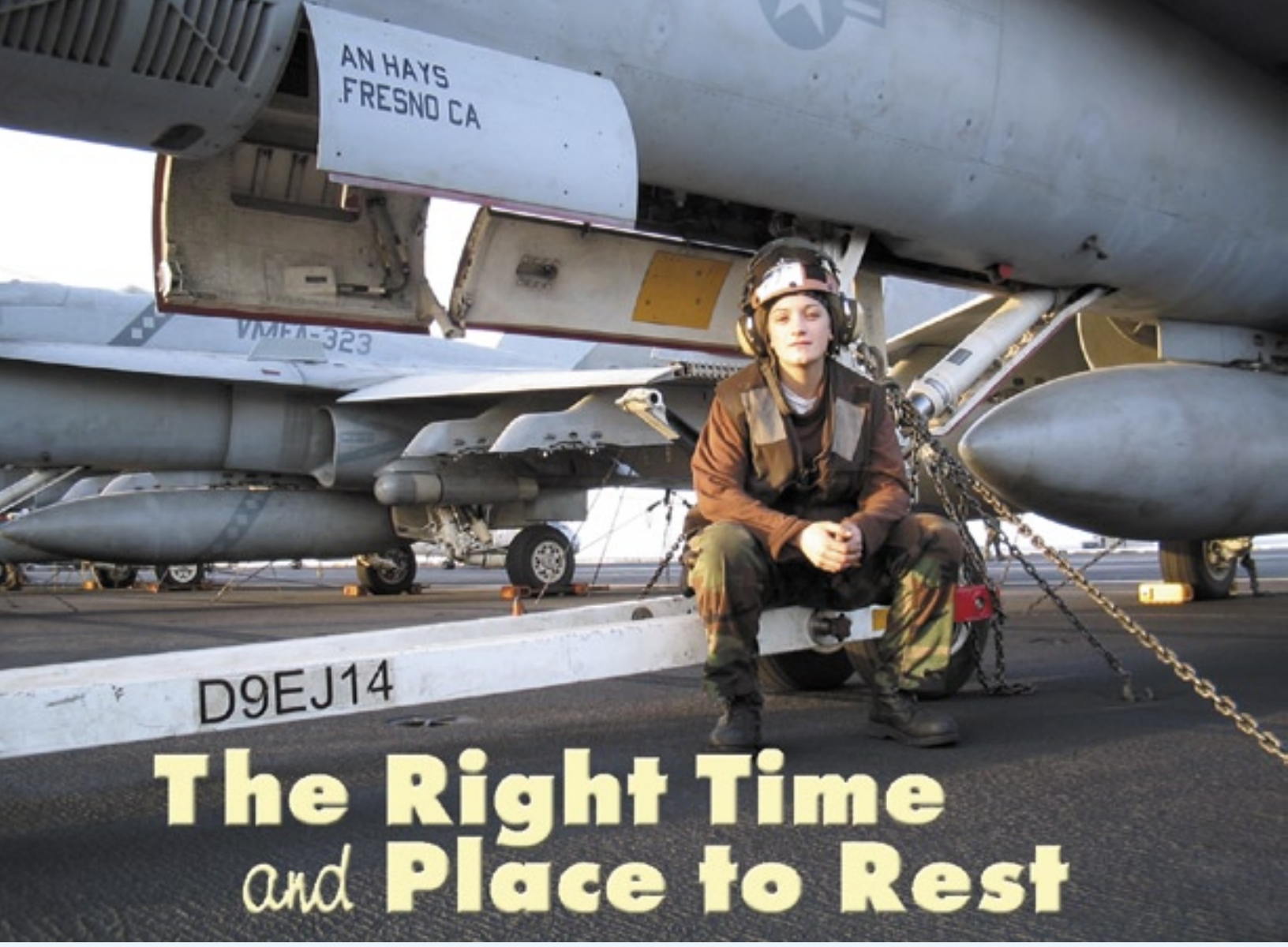

The Right Time and Place to Rest

By AN Sheena Hays

My day didn't start off on the best foot because I was tired. A few of my shipmates were a little hazy about the silence-about-the-decks concept, so sleep didn't come easy.

I reported to work as a plane captain for VFA-146 but with a little black cloud over my head. Trying to put it behind me, I suited up in my full flight-deck uniform and headed for the flight deck to prepare my jet for the night's flight schedule.

I knew my jet wasn't going up for a few hours, but the No. 1 rule for an FA-18 flight schedule in the Arabian Gulf is the probability of change. After all, an "up" jet on the roof is a spare flyer for every event. With that in mind, I completed my walk-around, opened and propped the required doors, checked and depressed circuit breakers, prepped the seat, dove the ducts, pulled pins, and then decided to do another walk-around…just in case.

After I had finished my second walk-around, one of the yellow shirts approached me and rudely motioned me to get in the cockpit because they were going to move my jet. As I felt my blood come to a rolling boil, I attempted to shrug off the harshness and worked quickly to pin, pull, and close everything, so we could move the Hornet safely and correctly.

They repositioned me from the navigation pole to the six-pack, directly in front of the window for flight-deck control. Whistles blew, brakes were set, and, minutes later, I was down the ladder to reprep my jet, for the second time in minutes. It is fair to say I wasn't really smiling anymore, but I finished and walked around the whole jet, checking for chains or anything that might have been out of place.

I reached the point where I had started and noticed a fellow VFA-146 shipmate out the corner of my eye. He

was working as the flight-deck "scrubbie" driver. I hadn't seen him in a while, considered him a good friend, and wanted to see how he was doing. I motioned for him to come over. We began to talk, and, without thinking about the fact we still were recovering aircraft, we took a seat on the tow bar that was hooked up to my jet—only a few inches from the foul line!

We had been sitting for only 30 seconds, but that was 30 seconds too long. When it registered how unsafe our action was, we turned to get up, but it was too late. One of the flight-deck coordinators already was en route to fix our mistake. He ordered us to report to flight-deck control.

After a brief one-way conversation with "Dog," the CAG chief, my maintenance chief escorted me back to my shop because I had been kicked off the flight deck for the night.

Because of my lack of attention to detail and unsafe action, I had let down my fellow line-team members, my immediate supervisor, my chief, and myself. Everyone else had to pick up my slack because I had dropped my guard. I chose an aircraft carrier's flight deck as the place for a social call. I had been trained and qualified to work on the flight deck for quite some time, so I had no excuse for my actions.

I hope everyone will learn from my mistake. If you never think that complacency can or will happen to you, think again. It takes just a second to do the wrong thing and face the dog, or, worse, maybe not live to face anyone.

Airman Hays is a plane captain with VFA-146.

That's Gonna Leave a Mark

By AM1(AW) Steven Kedzie

Do you know what a left hook from Mike Tyson feels like? I believe I do. I found out one night when least expecting it.

It was a typical mid-week night for the Maintenance Department. For more than a month, we had been removing the outer wings of our Rhinos to repair wing-fold bushing migrations, and, by this time, we were extremely proficient. In fact, we were at a point where night check was able to remove two outer wings and have them repaired by the contractor and ready for reinstallation before knock off. Fortunately, on this night, we only had to remove one: the starboard outer wing on aircraft 115.

After the initial step of removing the various panels and hardware from the wing, large wing pins must be removed before the outer wing is free of the wing-fold transmission. Each of these pins is approximately one meter long and made of solid titanium. Their removal requires the use of a common tool: the slide hammer.

The slide hammer looks exactly as its name implies. It is a sliding handle with stops on either end, and it's threaded to one end of an extension shaft (see picture). The other end of the extension shaft is threaded to the wing pin being installed or removed. By moving the slide hammer back and forth to the desired stop, the wing pin is driven in or out of its housing. A shear pin resides in the threaded connection between the slide hammer and the extension shaft. The purpose of the shear pin is to prevent damage to the wing pin by breaking and releasing the slide hammer from the shaft if too much force is imparted on it during hammering.

After removing the panels and hardware, we used a deck crane to support the wing and prepared to remove the first outer wing pin. I was standing about eight feet forward of the starboard leading edge to safely observe